

Studio: 'It's pretty cool for Astoria's music scene'

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Community Radio, wired a post-production station along the wall for both digital and analog recordings. A central impetus for starting a studio was a 24-track tape machine he brought back from Nashville and rehabbed.

"I'm really excited to have the 1970s analog tape machine that's just known for having a classic sound and is a big part of what you love about some of those records from that era," he said. "And then we've got the full modern digital capabilities as well, so it's kind of the best of both worlds."

Caitlyn Faircloth, of the local band Monica and the Shy Boys, was recently in the Rope Room producing the band's crowdfunded debut album, one of the first productions coming out of the studio.

"It's pretty cool for Astoria's music scene," Faircloth said. "This is a really great space to be available for all the artists here. I did not think my album would be able to sound the way it's sounding."

Helping her were fellow local musicians Kati Claborn and Olaf Ydstie. Everyone involved in the formation of the Rope Room is a musician themselves, and many play in each other's bands, Ydstie said.

"It just kind of turns into a pretty cool pile of a lot of folks doing a lot of stuff together," he said.

Bovenizer estimates between 15 and 20 bands in his circle of Astoria friends alone. Traveling to Portland for studio time can run a band between \$500 and \$1,000 a day, with no guarantee they'll be happy with the finished product when they get home, he said.

"If you spend your whole budget tracking and mixing, then you've got nothing left for mastering and duplication and the artwork and stuff. Hopefully this creates capacity for all those other steps to get the treatment, the resources that are required to take it to the finish line."

The Rope Room isn't the first



Colin Murphey/The Daily Astorian

Kati Claborn monitors the recording equipment at the Rope Room.



Colin Murphey/The Daily Astorian

Caitlyn Faircloth, left, and Olaf Ydstie, right, lay down a track in the Rope Room recording studio in Astoria.

effort to provide a hub for regional artists. Jim Dwyer and Greg Duncan in the 2000s opened the Sound Bank, a recording studio and performance venue inside the former Astoria Bank building at Duane and 12th streets.

The building was later sold and turned into a wedding venue and eventually the Museum of Whimsy.

The Rope Room has started smaller, taking up a small portion of the building, a largely blank slate.

Throughout its history, the building has hosted part of the city's former YMCA athletic club, the New Beginnings Christian School and an antique auto museum.

Building owner David Rafkind said he has been performing deferred maintenance but hasn't settled on a grand vision. A self-described lover of music, he wanted to provide his friends a secluded space for professional recording.

People shouldn't expect any parties, social gatherings or splashy events at the Rope Room, which is rentable through theroperoom@gmail.com.

"It's not a social thing," Bovenizer said. "It's not just something you can pop into. It's an art studio. That's really what it comes down to."



Colin Murphey/The Daily Astorian

A retaining wall helps keep a section of Highway 202 from sliding and causing more damage.

Sinkhole: Highway will still be slumped until permanent repair is possible

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because of issues connected to 4 inches of rain from Friday evening through Sunday morning.

"If you have two days of several inches of rain, you can have your hands full," he said.

Jim Riekkola, a log truck driver, has lived in a house above the problem section of Highway 202 since 2006.

"It's been sinking the whole time," he said.

The constant repairs haven't been a major hassle, but his primary concern has been with how people choose to get around the slump.

There's a sharp corner down from his driveway entrance. It's hard enough to see the traffic that is coming around the corner, but as problems with the road persist, people driving eastbound who are familiar with the slump are sometimes already moving into the westbound lane as they shoot around the corner.

"You can't see them," Riekkola said. "We have

to just creep out of the driveway."

He and others suspect the source of the problem with the road might be farther down near the river. They aren't convinced the state's constant repairs are doing much.

"I know," Miller said of the residents' concerns. "That particular spot has been frustrating me as well."

He is optimistic about the success of the reinforced wall, though.

After another week of letting the road settle, crews plan to go out to smooth one particularly large bump in the road, Miller said.

The highway will still be slumped until a more permanent repair is possible. This repair work, which involves digging out the road and filling in the sunken area with rock and then repaving with asphalt, will likely occur later in the summer, according to Lou Torres, a spokesman for the Department of Transportation.

"And then we'll be done with it," Miller said. He hopes.

Vaping: 'I encourage you to simply say 'no''

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thousands of people quit smoking.

"How many doctors can say that?" he asked, adding if the new tax passed he would move to New Mexico or Nevada.

Others had a different take. On Wednesday, three high school girls testified that vaping, specifically using the popular electronic cigarette product Juul, has interrupted their education. Students can vape in class, in the bathroom or anywhere else because the product is so discrete, they testified.

According to the non-profit Truth Initiative, Juul sales increased 641 percent from 2016 to 2017.

Tess Wright, of Beaverton High School, said Juul is following Big Tobacco's playbook, even turning the use of the product into a verb: "juuling."

The next day, Max Behlke, a tax policy analyst for Juul Labs, said the company's goal is to rid the world of cigarettes. However, in December, Altria, one of the largest cigarette-makers in the world, announced a \$13 billion investment in Juul.

Behlke also argued that an increase in the cigarette tax would just grow the black market, saying such an issue occurred in New York.

Last month, Jon Hart, an economist for the Oregon Department of Revenue, told the committee that Washingtonians buy a significant amount of cigarettes in Oregon and smuggle it back because of the tax disparity.

The proposed tax increase would put Oregon closer to the taxing level of Washington state and California. Idaho would still be significantly lower, Hart said, but the eastern part of the state is so sparsely populated that he didn't think a significant number of Oregonians would drive east to save a couple of dollars per pack.

On Wednesday, several witnesses said an increase in cigarette taxes would hurt small retailers like gas stations and convenience stores.

Kole Olinger, manager at Jacksons Food Stores, testified that cigarettes made up a third of the in-store sales at their gas station convenience stores. Cigarettes bring people into the store and then they buy other products, he said.

The proposals, however, have strong backing.

Brown testified Wednesday that the tax increase would generate \$346 million as part of a six-year revenue package to stabilize funding for the Oregon Health Plan. It would also price smokers, particularly younger ones, out of the habit, she said.

Bud Pierce, an oncologist who ran against Brown in 2016, agreed with Brown that the tax would save lives.

"Cigarettes are a unique product," he said. "When used as directed, they are dangerous."

Jonathan Polonsky, president of Plaid Pantry convenience stores, said increasing the tax was unfair and would lead to cigarette bootlegging. He also denounced the idea of putting the proposed cigarette tax to the voters, since a minority of Oregonians smoke. He said that would feed the "tyranny of the majority" and be undemocratic.

Several vape store owners said a tax on their product could put them out of business. They also said a price increase would drive people back to cigarettes, though that likely does not take into account the proposed increase of the tobacco tax.

Pierce warned lawmakers of being swayed by lobbyists and their "blood money."

"I encourage you to simply say 'no,'" he said.

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Tax: Current plan is a blend of the two competing concepts

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makers to find new revenue for K-12 education over the next biennium. Hass said he is shooting for at least \$1 billion per year.

Money from the new tax would go into a new state fund called the Fund for Student Success, which will support K-12 education statewide.

Revenue from the corporate activity tax will pay for the \$2 billion Student Success Act that legislators unveiled last week. The tax plan, which is still subject to change, is a part of that act.

Hass, Nathanson and other key legislators have been studying two closely related models for several months, trying to decide how to craft their corporate activity tax plan.

Oregon Business & Industry, a coalition of some of the state's largest employers, suggested that lawmakers look into a value-added tax to ensure businesses don't have to pay more for every step in their production process. At least some production costs would be deducted from the tax bill — an idea that made it into the plan posted Thursday on the Legislature's website.

A rival group called Coalition for the Common Good, made up primarily of labor groups and Beaverton-based Nike Inc.,

put forward another option modeled off of Ohio's commercial activity tax. That proposal resembled Measure 97, a proposed gross-receipts tax that voters rejected in 2016.

The current plan is a blend of the two competing concepts.

"I want to do the best policy that is most fair to most businesses," Hass said earlier this spring. "I'm going to avoid a situation where this places a greater burden on one sector or one size of business."

Melissa Unger, executive director of Service Employees International Union 503, reacted positively to the plan.

"We are encouraged about the direction the Legislature is headed, funding critical services with a reasonable corporate tax," Unger said.

In Oregon, raising taxes or creating a new tax requires the approval of three-fifths of senators and three-fifths of representatives. That gives the Democratic majority a narrow path to passage, as the 18 Senate Democrats constitute exactly three-fifths of the chamber.

Lawmakers also have other major issues to sort through.

The education package itself is complex, and it has already faced pushback from Brown, who said last week she wants a

share of the new tax revenue to go toward public colleges and universities.

As proposed by legislators, the Student Success Act would invest \$2 billion over a biennium into K-12 education. Those dollars would pay for more teachers and support staff, instructional days, elective and extracurricular activities while also investing in early childhood education and preschool programs, mental and behavioral health resources, and recovery planning for struggling school districts, among other areas.

Both the business tax and the lower personal income tax rates would take effect next year. Projections suggest the tax plan would bring in just shy of \$1 billion for K-12 education in 2020.

However, opponents could force a statewide vote on the tax changes if they get through the Legislature. Controversial bills are often referred to the ballot, a process that a senator and a representative can initiate.

"We're ready for that," Hass said of a potential referral. "If that's the way it goes, that's the way it goes."

The last time a major tax increase was on the statewide ballot was Measure 97 in 2016. Voters shot down the proposed \$3 billion corporate sales tax, with 59% voting "no" to bury the measure.

Hass attempted to marshal support for a more modest tax package in 2017, but his plan died without a vote.

Brown has proposed \$12.3 billion in spending for the Department of Education, 11% more than the current budget.

Oregon has the second-lowest high school graduation rate in the country, according to U.S. Department of Education data. Only New Mexico graduates fewer of its high school students within four years.

Funding levels for Oregon schools have declined since voters approved Measure 5 in 1990, slashing the amount of money schools receive from local property taxes. Instructional time has fallen in many school districts, as have staffing levels.

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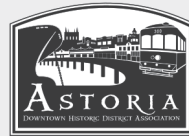
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